

## DISPELLING THE [ALLEGED] ABSURDITY THAT AN EXTERNAL OBJECT CANNOT BE COGNIZED BY A SENSE CONSCIOUSNESS

In this outline, our own system rebuts an objection by an opponent who is a follower of the Vaisheshika School. The objection is based on the above-mentioned assertion of the Vaisheshikas, who argue that if a coarse external phenomenon such as the body had parts, the body and its subtle particles would be of one nature. According to the Vaisheshikas, this would mean that there is no body (with a particular shape and color) that connects those particles; there would only be the subtle particles of which the body is made.

Therefore, the opponent argues that if a part-possessor and the subtle particles it possesses were of one nature, there would be no sense objects, such as shapes, colors, sounds and so forth, that ordinary beings could apprehend with their sense consciousnesses.

[Dharmakirti says in the *Pramanavarttika*:]

*Someone says: It is many [subtle particles] just as before;  
Because there is no difference and it is very subtle  
They are not cognized [by a sense consciousness] .....*

Someone says: If a coarse external object is not a different substantial entity than its subtle particles, then **it is** nothing more than an occurrence of **many** subtle particles. In that case, it also follows that **just as before**, at the time when the many separate particles [had not yet assembled], the external object [composed of those particles] is not cognized [now] by a sense consciousness. This is **because** (a) **there is no difference** between the earlier [and the present particles] and (b) [the coarse external objects] is **very subtle** particles.

A follower of the Vaisheshika system argues that if a vase, for instance, did not exist as a separate entity of a different nature than its component particles, there would only be particles and no vase could be perceived by an ordinary eye consciousness.

Both Buddhists and Vaisheshikas agree that there is a difference between the particles before and after they have assembled to form a vase that can be used to hold water, etc.

However, according to the Vaisheshikas, if the vase were of the same nature as the particles, there would be no actual vase and thus no real difference between what was there before and after the particles came together, since in both cases there would be just two different assemblies of a multitude of subtle particles<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, they argue, an ordinary eye consciousness would not perceive a vase either before or after (the particles had assembled) because a vase would be nothing more than subtle particles, and subtle particles are not visible to an ordinary sense awareness.

Our own system gives a reply to each of the two reasons presented above by the opponent:

[Dharmakirti says in the *Pramanavarttika*:]

*.....It is not established  
That there is no difference, because the form that is distinct [from the earlier form]  
[Would] be the object of the sense [consciousness].....*

<sup>1</sup> According to the Vaisheshikas, if the vase and its particles were of one nature, the vase and its particles would be one and the same. There would be no difference between the vase and its particles. Geshe Palden Drakpa uses the analogy of grains of sand: according to the Vaisheshikas, a vase would be like grains of sand that are unable to form a solid object.

[Response:] The first reason is not established: it is not established **that there is no difference** between a form that acts as the observed object condition of a sense consciousness and a form that does not act as such an observed object condition. This is because **the form that is distinct from** the earlier form would have to **be the object of** apprehension of the **sense** consciousness.

In response to the first reason (“because (a) there is no difference between the earlier [and the present particles]”), i.e., to the opponent claiming that if the vase and its particles were of one nature there would be no difference between the particles before and after they had formed the vase, our own system contends:

Although on a subtle level the subtle particles merely group together in different ways, on a coarser level this may account for significant differences among the various phenomena with regard to their color, shape, function, and other characteristics. Similarly, the way the particles have come together determines whether an object does or does not serve as the *observed object condition*<sup>2</sup> of a particular sense consciousness. Thus, it is in dependence on the way in which its subtle particles have assembled that an object may or may not appear to an eye consciousness as a vase.

[Dharmakirti says in the *Pramanavarttika*:]

.....*It is not subtle particles.* [89]

The (b) second reason is not established: Regarding the subject, a vase, it follows that **it is not subtle particles**, because it is an object that is able to induce an ascertaining consciousness through the power of a direct sense *pramana*.

In response to the second reason (“[a coarse external object] is very subtle particles”), i.e., to the opponent professing that if the vase and its particles were of one nature, the vase would merely be subtle particles, our own system counters:

This is not correct because not only does the vase give rise to an eye consciousness that is a valid cognizer directly perceiving the vase, it also generates a conceptual consciousness which ascertains that the object is a vase. Therefore, the vase is more than mere particles, as it is clearly perceived as a vase with a particular shape, color, etc. by a sense consciousness and is thereafter identified as such by a mental awareness.

Acharya Devendrabuddhi says in his commentary on this [passage in the *Pramanavarttika*], “At that time, subtle particles are not the object of convention”. The meaning [of what Devendrabuddhi] says is: [at that time] sense consciousnesses do not realize conventions through their own power, for sense consciousnesses induce coarse conventions such as “This is form”, and so forth.

Our own system’s explanation is affirmed by a quote from the Indian Buddhist master Devendrabuddhi. Devendrabuddhi explains in his commentary on the *Pramanavarttika*: at the time when the subtle particles have assembled to form a coarse external phenomenon, such as a vase, an eye consciousness apprehends the shape and color of the vase and gives rise to conventions (i.e., to conceptual consciousnesses) with regard to the vase. However, the eye consciousness does not give rise to conventions with regard to the *subtle particles* of the vase because the eye consciousness does not *cognize* any of the particles (although the subtle particles that are in the sphere of vision of the eye consciousness *appear* to it).

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<sup>2</sup> An *observed object condition* (Tib: *dmigs rkyen*) of an awareness refers to an object that is both (1) the appearing object of that awareness and (2) the direct cause that gives rise to the awareness.

In the case of an eye consciousness perceiving a vase, the vase is the observed object condition of that sense consciousness since it is one of the causes that directly generates the awareness and it is what appears to the eye consciousness.

The eye consciousness gives rise to conventions in the sense that it induces for instance, a conceptual consciousness that designates “vase” upon cognizing a round-bellied, flat-based phenomenon able to perform the function of holding water. The conceptual consciousness designates or imputes “vase” because it thinks, “This is a vase”, based on the previously cognized shape, color and assembled parts of the vase.

Likewise, through thinking, “This is a beautiful form”, a conceptual consciousness affixes the label “beautiful form”. These conventions arise on the basis of having previously cognized the color, shape and the assembled parts of the vase with a sense consciousness.

But since the sense consciousnesses (of an ordinary person) do not cognize any subtle particles they do not induce any conventions or conceptual consciousness with regard to those particles.

Just as [the Vaisheshikas] accept that whatever is a coarse phenomenon does not exist substantially, they say this text indicates that “it is impossible for sense consciousnesses to see subtle particles”. This is greatly unreasonable:

According to the Vaisheshika system, coarse phenomena do not exist substantially, i.e., coarse, external objects such as a vase or a table are permanent. Also, followers of the Vaisheshika system would interpret the above-cited lines from the *Pramanavarttika* (“.....It is not established / That there is no difference, because the form that is distinct [from the earlier form] / [Would] be the object of the sense [consciousness]. It is not subtle particles.”) to mean that subtle particles are not an object of the sense consciousnesses since the sense consciousnesses do not see subtle particles.

In general, the term “to see” does not mean ‘to cognize’ or ‘to realize’ but ‘to have something appear’. Hence, an opponent claims that the Vaisheshikas interpret the words from the *Pramanavarttika* to mean that subtle particles do not appear to an (ordinary) sense consciousness.

Our own system rejects that. An eye consciousness apprehending a vase apprehends its object by way of the vase appearing to the awareness. Yet the vase can only appear if the subtle particles of the vase – that are in the sphere of vision of the awareness – *appear*. This does not, however, mean that the eye consciousness *apprehends* or cognizes the subtle particles as they are too subtle for an (ordinary) sense consciousness to be aware of them.

Regarding the subject, blue, it follows that it is subtle particles, because it is (a) an external object and (b) not coarse. If [the Vaisheshikas respond that] the reason is not established, it contradicts the previous thesis. If they accept [the thesis of the present consequence], it follows that blue is not subtle particles, because it is seen by sense consciousnesses. [Or the Vaisheshikas] have to assert that an eye consciousness does not see blue!

In order to refute the Vaisheshikas assertion that coarse phenomena are permanent, our own system cites the following consequence<sup>3</sup>: *Regarding the subject, blue, it follows that it is subtle particles, because (a) it is an external object and (b) not coarse.*

There are two ways in which the Vaisheshikas could respond to this consequence: (1) They could reply that the reason is not established or (2) that the reason is not pervaded by the predicate. If they do not opt for either of these, they are only left with agreeing with the thesis.

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<sup>3</sup> As explained before, a consequence is (like a syllogism) a form of logical statement. It is cited to help another person to first recognize, and then let go of a wrong view.

If the Vaisheshikas replied that the reason of the consequence is not established, i.e., that the color blue is not (a) an external phenomenon and not (b) *not* coarse, they would indicate that the color blue is a coarse phenomenon (i.e., not *not* coarse). In that case they would have to accept that blue is not substantially existent and thus not impermanent, for according to their above-mentioned thesis, whatever is a coarse phenomenon is necessarily *not* substantially existent. However, the Vaisheshikas hold that the color blue is impermanent, which stands in contradiction to their thesis.

Although Gyaltsab Je does not explicitly mention it, it would not make sense either if the Vaisheshikas gave the second response: that the reason is not pervaded by the predicate. In other words, it would not make sense if the Vaisheshikas said that (a) an external object that is (b) not coarse is not necessarily subtle particles. This is because it would contradict their assertion that external objects, which are not coarse, are necessarily subtle particles.

If the Vaisheshikas accepted the thesis of the consequence, i.e., that blue is subtle particles, it would contradict their view that subtle particles do not appear to sense consciousnesses. This is because the Vaisheshikas hold that blue appears to an eye consciousness.

Alternatively, the Vaisheshikas would have to accept that blue does not appear to an eye consciousness.

It follows that whatever is the object of a sense direct perceiver stands in contradiction to being a functioning thing. This is because (a) it is impossible for subtle particles to be the object of [sense direct perceivers] and (b) whatever is coarse stands in contradiction to being a functioning thing.

Furthermore, if it were the case – as claimed by the opponent – that subtle particles do not appear to sense direct perceivers (i.e., to the sense consciousnesses) and coarse phenomena are permanent, it would absurdly follow that impermanent phenomena are not the objects of the sense consciousnesses. This is because impermanent phenomena that are the object of one of the sense consciousnesses must be physical objects and physical objects are either (a) subtle particles or (b) coarse phenomena (that consist of subtle particles).

Alternatively, the phrase “*It is many*” is, as it was before, an objection, and the phrase “*just as before*” is the reply: In the case of the body being many subtle particles, just as the subtle particles remained individually before [forming the body], it absurdly follows that a sense consciousness cognizes individually [the subtle particles that are the body], as it is impossible [for the body] to be coarse. That [is based on] the thought: if it is impossible for there be a partless part-possessor, then [an external object] is nothing more than its subtle particles. Therefore, it follows that subtle particles are cognized individually.

Well, since a partless part-possessor was refuted above, it is said that it follows that subtle particles are thus [individually] cognized.

Here Gyaltsab Je cites an alternative interpretation by the Indian Buddhist Master Prajnakaragupta of the first line from the *Pramanavarttika* pertaining to the present outline (“*Someone says: It is many [subtle particles] just as before*”):

As in the first interpretation, the words, “*It is many*” indicate an objection by an opponent. Yet unlike the first interpretation, the words “*just as before*” describe the reply by our own system to the objection.

Thus, this second interpretation differs slightly with regard to which words from the *Pramanavarttika* are associated with the opponent, and which words with our own system. The way the actual debate is described is similar to the way it is described according to the first interpretation: an opponent who is a follower of the Vaisheshika

says that if there is no partless part-possessor, a physical body would not be a coarse, partless phenomenon but subtle particles. This means there would be no difference between what was there before and after the particles of a physical body have come together – in both cases there would only be a multitude of individual subtle particles assembled differently.

Therefore, since a partless part-possessor has been refuted before (in the previous outline) the Vaisheshikas would have to contend that an eye consciousness apprehending a physical body apprehends or cognizes the particles of the body, which is impossible since they are too subtle.

## QUESTIONS FOR STUDY

1. According to the Vaisheshikas: what would be the consequence if a vase were of one nature with its particles?
2. According to our own system, what is the difference between an object such as a vase before its particles have assembled and after they have assembled?
3. What is the meaning of Devendrabodhi's words, "At that time, subtle particles are not the object of convention"?
4. What is the response by our own system to the Vaisheshika's claim that subtle particles are not seen by sense consciousnesses?
5. What is the alternative interpretation of the first line from the *Pramanavarttika* ("Someone says: *It is many [subtle particles] just as before*") that pertains to this outline?

## REFUTING ANOTHER TYPE OF [WRONG VIEW] THROUGH THAT

[Dharmakirti says in the *Pramanavarttika*:]

*This also clears away [the idea that objects]  
Do not have [the ability] to obstruct and so forth.*

Regarding the subject, **this** establishing of distinct subtle particles, it **also clears away** [the idea] that if a coarse partless object is not possible, external objects **do not have the ability to obstruct** [other phenomena]. This is because although there are no [coarse partless objects], it is indicated that the composites of subtle particles act in such a way [as to obstruct other phenomena].

As mentioned before, the Vaisheshikas assert that if a coarse external phenomenon such as a vase were of the same nature as its parts, it would be nothing other than the sum of its particles or atoms. This would also lead to the view that an external phenomenon could not block and obstruct other things, for its atoms would be too small to be able to do so.

In response to the first assertion, in the previous outline our own system established that there is a difference between the particles before and after they have assembled into the distinct particles of, for instance, a vase. Although in both cases subtle particles merely group together in different ways, this accounts for significant differences in shape, color, function, and so forth. Owing to the distinct way in which the particles of a vase, for instance, have assembled, sense consciousnesses perceiving the shape, etc. of the vase and conceptual awarenesses designating "vase" arise. This explanation also indicates that the sum of these assembled particles blocks or obstructs other phenomena from being in the exact same location as the vase. In other words, it is not possible for a book, for example, to be in the same spot as the vase.

## REFUTING [THE EXISTENCE OF] A PART-POSSESSOR AND, IN PARTICULAR, THE QUALITIES THAT ARE DEPENDENT ON IT

[This is divided into:]

- (1) The extreme absurdity, if a part-possessor that is of a different nature were needed for seeing something with a sense consciousness
- (2) Refuting a number, etc. being of a separate nature than that which it depends on

### THE EXTREME ABSURDITY, IF A PART-POSSESSOR THAT IS OF A DIFFERENT NATURE WERE NEEDED FOR SEEING SOMETHING WITH A SENSE CONSCIOUSNESS

[Dharmakirti says in the *Pramanavarttika*:]

*How could mercury mixed with gold or  
A painted stone appear [to a sense consciousness]? [90]*

**How could mercury mixed with gold, etc. or a painted stone appear** to a sense consciousness – it follows such is not feasible since they do not have a part-possessor that is of a separate nature. This is because they are [phenomena that are the result of] the coming together of particles of a discordant type.

The Vaisheshikas differentiate between phenomena that consist of *concordant* particles and *discordant* particles, for, according to this non-Buddhist school, a phenomenon consisting of concordant particles needs a separate part-possessor that is of a different nature than its parts in order to appear to a sense consciousness, whereas a phenomenon that consists of *discordant* particles can appear to a sense consciousness without such a part-possessor.

According to our own system, it does not make sense to differentiate between phenomena having a separate part-possessor or not, depending on whether they consist of concordant or discordant particles. If the Vaisheshikas are unable to posit a *whole* that appears to a sense consciousness without a separate part-possessor just because it is made of concordant particles, there is no reason why they would be able to posit a *whole* that appears to a sense consciousness without a separate part-possessor because it consists of *discordant* particles.

Therefore, our own system cites two examples, arguing that it would follow that mercury mixed with gold and a stone painted with different colors would not appear to a sense consciousness, because they consist of discordant particles yet do not have a separate part-possessor that is of a different nature than its parts.

Regarding the mixture of mercury and gold, mercury is a solvent of gold. Yet, although mercury breaks gold's atomic structural bond, causing the gold to dissolve, the process can be reversed through boiling off the mercury or by chemical treatment. Gold and mercury appear inseparable (and form a unique entity) when mixed together yet there is a difference between their atomic structures. Hence, the two metals consist of – as the Vaisheshikas put it – discordant particles and their mixture is thus “the result of the coming together of particles of a discordant type”.

The same is true for a painted stone. Although a painted stone appears to be inseparable from the paint, the stone and the paint consist of discordant atoms or particles.

Please note that our own system agrees with the Vaisheshika that the mixture of mercury and gold and the painted stone do not require a separate part-possessor to

appear to a sense consciousness. Yet, as mentioned above, our own system disagrees with the Vaisheshika's assertion that a phenomenon requires a separate part-possessor, or not, simply on the basis of whether it consists of concordant particles or not. Our own system argues that if phenomena of concordant particles could not appear to a sense consciousness unless they had a separate part-possessor, the same would be true for phenomena of *discordant* particles – they could not appear to a sense consciousness either unless they had a separate part-possessor. Hence it would follow that mercury mixed with gold and a stone painted with different colors would not appear to a sense consciousness, for they would need a separate part-possessor to do so, yet such a part-possessor does not exist.

Based on this passage, it is not reasonable to accept that, when a lump of iron is blazing red hot, the fire [element] and the iron are different substantial entities for it has been established in Dharmakirti's ***Pramanaviniscaya*** that those two are one substantial entity, and Acharya Dharmottara extensively explains in his commentary [on the ***Pramanaviniscaya***] that the case [of gold mixed with mercury and the painted stone] and that [of hot iron] are not the same.

Some opponents believe that a piece of red hot iron and its fire element (i.e., the heat of the iron) are of different natures, because like the example of mercury mixed with gold and the painted stone, two disconnected phenomena – heat and a piece of iron – come together to form the entity of hot iron, and later (upon the cooling of the iron) separate again. They argue that the hot iron is the result of the coming together of the particles of the heat and the particles of the iron, which are of a discordant type.

According to the opponents, although the fire element is inseparable from the hot iron, the fire element is not an integral part of the iron, for the fire element is not present before the iron is heated nor after it cools off. Furthermore, even when the fire element and the iron exist together, they appear differently to the sense consciousnesses. The piece of iron is a visual object and thus only appears to an eye consciousness, whereas the iron's heat is a tangible object and only appears to a body consciousness. Hence, the opponent believes that the hot iron and its heat must be of different natures.

Gyalsab Je explains that in dependence on the previous passage from the ***Pramanavarttika*** (*How could mercury mixed with gold or / A painted stone appear [to a sense consciousness]?*) one can come to understand that our own system does not agree with this, for – as established by Dharmakirti in his text ***Pramanaviniscaya*** and by Acharya Dharmottara's commentary on the ***Pramanaviniscaya*** – the heat of the molten iron and the molten iron are of one nature and therefore different from the examples of mercury mixed with gold and the painted stone. This is because the fire element of a hot piece of iron is a quality or attribute of that iron.

Dharmakirti and Dharmottara's view is in accordance with modern physics, which explains that when iron is heated, energy is added to the iron and absorbed by the iron's atoms, which causes the atoms to vibrate. At a certain temperature, the atoms release the energy originally absorbed from the heat in the form of photons that we can see. In the case of red-hot iron the photons carry red light, which is why the iron looks red. As the temperature increases the atoms vibrate faster which increases the space between them until the atomic bonds that ordinarily hold them together break. This is seen as the iron melting. Hence, the heat merely changes the structure of the iron's atoms and does not add any new atoms. This means that – unlike the mixture of mercury and gold or the painted stone – hot iron is not the result of discordant atoms coming together.

Dharmakirti says in the ***Pramanavarttika***:]

*[Since] the sense powers, etc. do not have the ability [to generate cognition] individually*

*How could they [generate] cognitions?*

Furthermore, how could the three conditions such as the sense powers, and so forth generate a common result, cognitions of form – it follows that is not feasible because they (a) do not have the capacity [to generate sense perception] individually, when they have not come together, and (b) even when they have come together, there is no part-possessor that is of a separate nature.

Our own system further argues that if phenomena made of discordant particles were to require a separate part-possessor in order to appear to a sense consciousness, they would also need a separate part-possessor in order to *generate* a sense consciousness.

Our own system cites the example of the three conditions<sup>4</sup> (Tib: *rkyen gsum*), arguing that, according to the above assertion, the three conditions can generate a single sense consciousness only if they have a separate part-possessor.

However, this would mean that the three conditions are not the causes of the different sense consciousnesses because *before* those three have come together, they are individually not capable to generate a sense consciousness. Once they have assembled, no separate part-possessor can be found that is of a different nature than its parts, the three conditions.

Dharmakirti says in the *Pramanavarttika*:]

*Someone says: [sense consciousnesses are generated] through the conjunction.....*

**Someone says:** Sense consciousnesses are generated **through the conjunction** of the three conditions when they meet.

An opponent replies that when the three conditions have come together the conjunction of those three gives rise to a sense consciousness.

As mentioned before, the Vaisheshikas assert that whatever exists pertains to one of the six categories: (1) substance, (2) quality, (3) activity, (4) generality, (5) particularity, and (6) inherence.

The second category, quality, has twenty-five types of which one is *conjunction*. According to the Vaisheshikas, a *conjunction* (Skt: *samyoga*, Tib: *ldan pa*) is a quality that refers to the temporary linking or coming together of different phenomena that can exist separate from each other. Hence the *coming together* of these phenomena is called “conjunction”. A conjunction is of a different nature than the phenomena that have come together and it appears to the mind.

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<sup>4</sup> As mentioned before, sense consciousnesses depend on three conditions without which they cannot arise: (1) the observed object condition, (2) the uncommon empowering condition, and (3) the immediately preceding condition.

(1) The observed object condition refers to the sense objects. For the eye consciousness, shape and color are the observed object condition, for the ear consciousness it is sound, for the nose consciousness smell, and so forth. In the case of an eye consciousness apprehending a table, the table is the observed object condition of that eye consciousness; the table is the main object and a cause of the eye consciousness because it is in dependence on the table that the eye consciousness takes on the aspect of the table, *i.e.*, that the table appears to the eye consciousness.

(2) The uncommon empowering condition refers to the physical sense power. The eye sense power is the uncommon empowering condition of the eye consciousness, the ear sense power of the ear consciousness, and so forth. Whatever appears to the sense powers also appears to their respective sense consciousnesses, with the sense powers enabling the sense consciousnesses to clearly perceive their individual sense objects.

(3) The immediately preceding condition is the moment of awareness that immediately precedes the sense consciousness; it refers to the consciousness that manifests a moment before the sense consciousness manifests. For instance, the eye consciousness apprehending a table is preceded by an awareness (a sense or mental consciousness) which serves as the cause of the eye consciousness since it is responsible for the eye consciousness arising as a luminous and knowing mind. If the eye consciousness were not preceded by a former moment of awareness, it would not be able to manifest as an experiencing and aware entity able to cognize its object.



As mentioned above, the Vaisheshikas do not accept that subtle particles can appear to the mind. Therefore, they postulate a separate part-possessor and a separate conjunction that are coarse enough to appear to consciousness: a coarse phenomenon consisting of concordant particles requires a separate part-possessor (Tib: *yan lag can don gzhan*) that keeps the particles together and appears to the mind, whereas phenomena consisting of discordant particles have a separate conjunction (Tib: *ldan pa don gzhan*) that does so.

In the case of, for instance, an eye consciousness perceiving a table, two of its conditions – the table and the physical sense power – consist of discordant particles. Therefore, according to the Vaisheshikas, when the three conditions (the table, the physical sense power, and an immediately preceding awareness) have come together, their *coming together* or conjunction then gives rise to the eye consciousness perceiving the table.

Dharmakirti says in the *Pramanavarttika*:]

*.....here the logical absurdities are the same.*

[Response:] It follows it is not feasible that the three conditions generate a conjunction, because even though **here** you accept the generating of the conjunction, **the logical absurdity is the same** when [the three conditions] have come together and when they have not come together.

If a sense consciousness were the result of the conjunction of the three conditions, the question would arise: what created the conjunction? If the conjunction were the result of the three conditions, it would lead to the same absurdity mentioned above:

Before the three conditions have assembled, they are individually not able to generate a conjunction. Once they have come together there would have to be a separate entity that served as the conjunction of the three conditions, yet such an entity cannot be found.

Dharmakirti says in the *Pramanavarttika*:]

*In case someone says that the conjunction of  
Gold and mercury appears [to the sense consciousnesses].*

**In case someone says that** with regard to this mixing of **gold and mercury**, although there is no part-possessor, **the conjunction** of subtle particles of discordant types **appears** to the sense consciousnesses.

An opponent here explains that according to the Vaisheshikas, a conjunction is also that which appears to a sense consciousness apprehending a mixture of mercury and gold. The discordant particles of the gold and mercury when mixed together do not have a separate partless part-possessor but a separate conjunction. It is thus the *coming together* or the conjunction of the particles of the gold and the mercury that appears to a sense consciousness apprehending that mixture.

Dharmakirti says in the *Pramanavarttika*:]

*[Since] it does not see the base, how does [a sense consciousness] cognize  
[the getting together of subtle particles]?*

[Response:] **How does** a sense consciousness explicitly **cognize** the getting together of that which is based on subtle particles – it follows that it is impossible since **it does not see the base**, the subtle particles. This refutes well those who say that sense consciousnesses do not see subtle particles but the accumulation of subtle particles.

Our own system replies that it would not be possible for a sense consciousness to explicitly apprehend the conjunction of the subtle particles of its object.

Please note that there is a difference between *explicitly* and *implicitly* apprehending an object. When a sense consciousness explicitly apprehends its object, the consciousness apprehends the object while the object appears to it. When it implicitly apprehends its object, the awareness apprehends the object without the object appearing to it.

Therefore, our own system argues that a sense consciousness would not explicitly apprehend the conjunction of the particles of gold and mercury because the conjunction does not appear to the consciousness. The conjunction of the particles does not appear since the base of the conjunction, the particles, do not appear to the sense awareness. This is because – according to the Vaisheshikas – subtle particles are not seen by a sense consciousness.

The argument our own system presents here challenges the view of the Vaisheshikas that although a sense awareness sees the accumulation or conjunction of subtle particles it does not see the subtle particles themselves<sup>5</sup>.

As mentioned above, to “see” an object means ‘to have the object appear’. According to our own system, a sense consciousness such as an eye consciousness explicitly apprehends a shape and color by way of the subtle particles of that shape and color – that are in the sphere of vision of the eye sense power – appearing to the awareness without the awareness apprehending them.

Dharmakirti says in the *Pramanavarttika*:]

*It is contradictory for [a drink] to possess [qualities such as] taste, appearance, and so forth.*

Regarding the subject, a drink that is made of substances of various discordant types, it follows **that it is contradictory for it to possess** qualities such as a delicious **taste**, a nice **appearance, and so forth**, because there is no part-possessor that is of a separate nature; [there is no] base that possesses those [qualities].

Here our own system addresses again the Vaisheshika assertion that phenomena consisting of discordant particles do not require a separate part-possessor in order to appear to a sense consciousness, whereas phenomena consisting of concordant particles do.

Our own system argues that if sense objects consisting of discordant particles did not need such a part-possessor, it would follow (based on the assertions of the Vaisheshika) that a tasty drink made of different ingredients – and thus of discordant particles – would not have a unique taste, smell, color, and so forth as a result of mixing together different ingredients. This is because there would be no separate entity that possessed those qualities.

Dharmakirti says in the *Pramanavarttika*:]

*In case someone [says:] we accept that it is through having fully designated.....*

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<sup>5</sup> Geshe Palden Drakpa presents the following debate: does this mean that an object can only appear if its base appears. If that is the case, it follows that a conventional truth such as a vase appears to a Bodhisatta’s meditative absorption directly realizing the emptiness of the vase, because the vase is the base of the emptiness of the vase and because (as asserted) the emptiness of the vase can only appear to that meditative absorption if its base appears. However, it is not correct to assert that the vase appears to a Bodhisattva’s meditative absorption directly realizing emptiness since this absorption is a non-dual awareness to which only ultimate truths and no conventional truths appear.

**In case someone** says: even if there is no part-possessor that is of a separate nature, **we accept that** there is the convention of a deliciously tasting, etc. drink **through having fully designated** [those] on [the basis of] the taste and the appearance of its parts.

An opponent replies that although there is no separate part-possessor of a different nature than its parts, on the basis of the taste, smell, and so forth of the drink's different ingredients, individual conceptual consciousnesses designating conventions such as "delicious taste", "nice color", etc. arise, from thinking, "This is delicious", "It is a nice color" and so forth.

Dharmakirti says in the *Pramanavarttika*:]

.....[It would follow that] different awarenesses are [generated].

[Response:] It follows that **different awarenesses are** generated, to which the uncommon taste, appearance, and so forth of [the individual ingredients of] that drink appear separately. But it is not possible for an awareness to be generated to which the taste, appearance, etc. [of the different ingredients] that have arisen from commonly combining [those ingredients] appear [together]. This is because the delicious taste, etc. is merely designated on [the basis of] the taste and appearance of the parts [i.e., the ingredients] that are not mixed with a part-possessor, etc.

In response, our own system argues it would follow that in the case of a fruit milkshake, for instance, it is impossible for the drink to induce sense consciousnesses to which the milkshake's unique color, shape, taste, etc. appear. Instead, the drink would only give rise to different eye consciousnesses to which the color and shape of the ingredients would appear – an eye consciousness to which the color and shape of the milk appears, an eye consciousness to which the color and shape of the fruit appears, an eye consciousness to which the color and shape of the sugar appears, and so forth. Similarly, it would give rise to different tongue consciousnesses to which the taste of the milk, the taste of the fruit, and the taste of the sugar appear. The same would apply regarding the smell and tangibility of the ingredients.

The reason is, according to the Vaisheshikas, that the different conventions regarding the milkshake's color, taste, etc. would be designated only on the basis of the color, taste, etc. of each of the drink's ingredients. The convention of the drink being tasty, for instance, refers to the conceptual consciousness thinking, "This drink is tasty". Since they assert that this conceptual consciousness would be based on the taste of the milkshake's ingredients, it would have been induced by individual tongue consciousnesses apprehending the taste of the different ingredients without those ingredients or parts of the milkshake being mixed together with a separate part-possessor.

Alternatively, it would follow that with regard to a drink [arisen from] combining different substances, the experience of another taste different from the awareness experiencing the taste of individual drinks, such as milk, and so forth is not tenable. This is because one merely designates delicious taste, etc. [based] on the taste of the parts, not [based] on the taste of the part-possessor.

Devendrabuddhi explains the words of the *Pramanavarttika* ("[It would follow that] different awarenesses are [generated].") based on the *experience* of the sense consciousnesses not based on what appears to them: If a drink such as a fruit milkshake did not have a separate part-possessor, it would follow that there would be no tongue consciousness experiencing (i.e., explicitly realizing the milkshake's taste) other than the tongue consciousness experiencing the taste of its ingredients such as the milk. This is because any convention with regard to the milkshake's taste is based on the milkshake's ingredients or parts, not on its part-possessor.

[Dharmakirti says in the **Pramanavarttika**:]

*How [could a flower garland] be called “a long garland”?*

**How** could a neatly arranged garland of a hundred flowers **be called “a long garland”**? it follows it is not tenable, because with regard to it there is no part-possessor that is of a separate nature and although there is [according to you] a conjunction, a second quality cannot be based on a quality.

Our own system presents another argument to refute the Vaisheshika assertion that phenomena consisting of discordant particles do not require a separate part-possessor. Dharmakirti gives the example of a flower garland that is made of different flowers strung together with a thread. It would follow that such a garland could not have the quality of being long and thus be referred to as “a long garland”. This is because it consists of discordant particles (i.e., of the particles of the thread and the different types of flowers) and thus would have no separate part-possessor but a conjunction. However, the Vaisheshikas assert that both ‘long’ and a conjunction are qualities and that a quality cannot be based on another quality. Therefore, it would not be correct to posit a conjunction in order to explain that the garland is long since a conjunction of the flower garland could not be based on the length of the garland.

## QUESTIONS FOR STUDY

1. What does our own system establish with the two examples of a mixture of mercury and gold and a painted stone?
2. Why are a hot piece of iron and its fire element of one nature?
3. What is the difference between a separate part-possessor and a separate conjunction?

## REFUTING A NUMBER, ETC. BEING OF A DIFFERENT NATURE THAN THAT WHICH IT RELIES ON

[This is divided into:]

- (1) Citing a reason
- (2) Eliminating contradictions with regard to that

## CITING A REASON

[Dharmakirti says in the **Pramanavarttika**:]

*The nature of [vases] that have a quantity, etc.  
[And the words] expressing [“vase”] does not appear to  
An awareness as being different [substantial entities than]  
The nature of the quantity, conjunction, action, and so forth.*

Regarding the subject, **the nature of** vases that **have a** [certain] **quantity, etc.** and of the word **expressing** “vase”, there is no **nature of the** vases’ **quantity, conjunction, action, and so forth** that is a **different** substantial entity than them. This is because if such [a nature] existed it should appear to a non-mistaken awareness, but it **does not appear to a non-mistaken awareness**.

Here our own system states that with regard to a vase or the word “vase”, for instance, there is no separate phenomenon that serves as the vase’s quantity, conjunction or action and that is a different substantial entity than the vase or the word “vase”.

Of course, wherever there are vases, there is a given number of vases but this does not mean that there is some separate “amount” or “number” that corresponds to any numerical specification.

Similarly, a vase can only exist if there is the conjunction or the *coming together* of the vase’s subtle particles yet this conjunction does not exist as a phenomenon that is of a different nature than the vase or the label “vase”.

Also, a vase performs certain actions or functions. For example, it performs the function of holding water or of giving rise to its result. However, none of these actions exist as essential entities separate from the vase or its label.

If such separate entities were to exist, they would have to appear to a non-mistaken awareness such as a valid cognizer, but this is not the case.

## ELIMINATING CONTRADICTIONS WITH REGARD TO THAT

[This is divided into:]

- (1) Refuting [the idea] that since we apply different words, substantially different objects are established
- (2) Dispelling [the objection that] if those are not established, it follows that different words are senseless

## REFUTING [THE IDEA] THAT SINCE WE APPLY DIFFERENT WORDS SUBSTANTIALLY DIFFERENT OBJECTS ARE ESTABLISHED

Someone says: The quantity, etc. [of vases] that is of a separate nature than [those] vases exists because we can see that there are words for “one vase”, “two vases”, and so forth.

An opponent argues that the vases’ quantity must exist as a separate entity, for we refer to vases with words such as “one vase”, “two vases”, etc. Since we apply different labels to specify how many vases there are, there must be a separate entity that corresponds to this numerical specification.

[Dharmakīrti says in the *Pramanavarttika*:]

*Words [and conceptual] consciousnesses have objects that are imputed by conceptual consciousnesses*

*That adhere [to excluding what is other than] that which is different from the entity [that is not the object]*

[Response:] Just because we see there are different **words** and conceptual **consciousnesses**, it does not follow that they have substantially different objects. This is because although ‘a vase’s [being] one’ that is of a separate nature than a vase does not exist, [the words expressing “one vase” or the conceptual consciousnesses apprehending one vase] **have an object that is imputed by conceptual consciousnesses that adhere to excluding what is other than that which is different from the entity** that is not ‘one vase’.

Our own system replies that although there are (a) different words to describe the numerous attributes of a phenomenon and (b) different conceptual consciousnesses thinking about these attributes, this does not mean that the attributes are of a different nature than the phenomenon.

It is important to understand that words and conceptual consciousnesses are similar in the way they operate with regard to their objects.

According to Buddhist philosophy, a word refers to a verbal sound that expresses something (but not to a written word). An example is the verbal sound “vase”. Its object is ‘vase’ and it engages or expresses ‘vase’ by way of merely excluding or negating anything that is *not vase*. The word “vase” is not able to reveal the vase fully; it does not speak of any of the vase’s different parts or attributes.

A conceptual consciousness is a type of mind that conceptually apprehends or thinks of its object. An example is the conceptual consciousness apprehending (or thinking of) ‘vase’. Like a word, it operates by way of exclusion, for it arrives at its object through negation. The conceptual consciousness apprehending ‘vase’ mentally separates its object from everything else, in that it merely negates *not vase*. Unlike a sense consciousness, it does not perceive its object fully by way of the numerous parts and attributes of the object appearing to it.

Since words and conceptual consciousnesses both engage (that is, express or apprehend) their objects through exclusion, they are referred to as “eliminative engagers” (Tib: *sel ’jug*).

Although a vase could never exist separately from its color, shape, subtle particles, impermanence and so forth, it is possible mentally (or verbally) to isolate the ‘vase’ without considering any of these attributes. The conceptual consciousness apprehending ‘vase’ isolates the vase by functionally negating all that is *not vase*. This is why the Buddhist scriptures talk of a phenomenon’s “isolate” (Tib: *ldog pa*) and of two things having “different isolates” (Tib: *ldog pa tha dad*).

Whatever is the *isolate* of a phenomenon is necessarily *one with* (i.e., identical with) the phenomenon. Hence, only ‘vase’ itself serves as the *isolate* of vase. Not even things that are synonymous with the vase such as ‘existent vase’, ‘impermanent vase’, or ‘opposite-from-not-vase’ are the *isolates* of the vase, for they do not appear to the conceptual consciousness apprehending ‘vase’.

This is the reason why the Buddhist masters distinguish between phenomena having *different isolates* and being of *different natures* (Tib: *ngo bo tha dad*), and between phenomena having *one isolate* (Tib: *ldog pa gcig*) and being of *one nature* (Tib: *ngo bo gcig*).

‘Vase’ and ‘opposite-from-not-vase’ have *different isolates* because they are not *identical*<sup>6</sup>. However, they are of *one nature*, for they are equivalent and one cannot exist without the other.

Similarly, the attributes of the vase such as its color, quantity, conjunction etc. have *different isolates* than the vase but they are of *one nature* with it. They are of *one nature* with the vase because they are parts of the vase without which the vase could not exist.

Having *one isolate* or *different isolates* is therefore determined by the way phenomena are apprehended by conceptual consciousnesses, whereas being of *one nature* or of *different natures* is determined by the way they are apprehended by direct perceivers.

Since conceptual consciousnesses are *eliminative engagers*, the conceptual consciousness apprehending ‘vase’ does not explicitly apprehend the ‘opposite-from-

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<sup>6</sup> Please note that having *one isolate* is synonymous with being *identical* or *one*. For instance, ‘vase’ and ‘vase’ have *one isolate* and ‘vase’ is thus *identical* or *one* with ‘vase’. Having *one isolate* basically means to have the same meaning and the same name.

Having *different isolates* is synonymous with being *different*. ‘Opposite-from-not-vase’, for example, is *different* from ‘vase’ since ‘opposite-from-not-vase’ and ‘vase’ have *different isolates*. Yet this does not contradict the fact that ‘vase’ and ‘opposite-from-not-vase’ are *equivalent* (since whatever is a ‘vase’, is necessarily the ‘opposite-from-not-vase’; whatever is the ‘opposite-from-not-vase’ is necessarily a ‘vase’; wherever there is a ‘vase’, there is necessarily the ‘opposite-from-not-vase’; and wherever there is the ‘opposite-from-not-vase’, there is necessarily a ‘vase’).

not-vase' and the conceptual consciousness apprehending the 'opposite-from-not-vase' does not explicitly apprehend 'vase'. Although 'vase' and the 'opposite-from-not-vase' are equivalent, they require different conceptual consciousnesses in order to both (a) appear to a conceptual consciousness and (b) be apprehended by it; they are explicitly apprehended by thought consciousnesses in isolation from each other, which is why they have *different isolates*.

Direct perceivers, on the other hand, are *collective engagers* (Tib: *sgrub 'jug*), for they apprehend their objects fully. An example of a direct perceiver is an eye consciousness apprehending a vase. It apprehends the vase fully, for not only does the vase appear, numerous other phenomena that are of one nature with the vase such as 'opposite-from-not-vase', 'one vase', the 'vase's impermanence', its color, shape, etc. also appear to the eye consciousness (without the awareness necessarily cognizing all of these phenomena).

Being *of one nature* or not with the vase is determined by a direct perceiver, because in the case of the eye consciousness apprehending the vase, 'impermanent vase', 'one vase', 'opposite-from-not-vase' the vase's color, shape, etc. appear to the eye consciousness as inseparable from the vase.

Phenomena that are *of different natures*, on the other hand, appear differently to direct perceivers. For example, a vase and a table (which are of *different natures*) appear to an eye consciousness as separate entities<sup>7</sup>.

Hence, it is in dependence on that mode of appearance that we can differentiate between phenomena that are *of one nature* and those that are *of different natures*.

The Vaisheshikas however do not distinguish between phenomena that have *different isolates* and phenomena that are *of different natures*. According to them, whatever is *different* from another phenomenon must be of a *different nature* than the phenomenon. Hence, they argue that vases and their quantity must be *of different natures* since the words we use to refer only to 'vases' are different to the words we use to refer to a specific number of vases, namely 'one vase', 'two vases', and so forth.

Our own system replies that the attributes of phenomena such as their quantity, etc. do not exist as substantially different entities even if we label or think of them in different ways. 'One vase' is not *of a different nature* than 'vase'. It is merely *different* from 'vase' since the two have *different isolates*. This is because, as explained above, the conceptual consciousness thinking of or imputing 'vase' operates by way of excluding everything that is *not* 'vase', while the conceptual consciousness thinking of or imputing 'one vase' excludes everything that is *not* 'one vase'.

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<sup>7</sup> According to some descriptions, a vase and its color, for instance, appear [inseparable] to an eye consciousness, much like the way a mixture of milk and water appears, while a vase and a table appear to an eye consciousness [as separate entities] the way the moon and a star appear.